BISS Biodiversity Information Science and Standards

Biodiversity Information Science and Standards 4: e58481
doi: 10.3897/biss.4.58481

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Conference Abstract

The Biodiversity Heritage Library Response to the Global COVID-19 Pandemic

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Received: 08 Sep 2020 | Published: 18 Sep 2020

Citation: Kalfatovic M, Rinaldo C, Smith J, Iggulden D, Funkhouser C (2020) The Biodiversity Heritage Library Response to the Global COVID-19 Pandemic. Biodiversity Information Science and Standards 4: e58481. https://doi.org/10.3897/biss.4.58481

Abstract

The global onset of the COVID-19 pandemic began in January 2020. In February, many academic and research institutions began to move to a telework environment. By March, many borders had been closed and nearly all institutions fully transitioned to telework. With their institutions closed and travel shut down, researchers lacked access to both specimen collections as well as the library and archives material needed to continue productive research. Preliminary research on the impact of COVID-19 on the research enterprise has been published. In the United States, the impact on federally funded research has been documented in *Effects of COVID-19 on the Federal Research and Development Enterprise* (Morgan and Sargent Jr. 2020). Likewise, *What Happens to the Continuity and Future of the Research Enterprise?* (Coalition for Networked Information 2020) is an initial appraisal of issues and concerns within the North American academic and research environment.

Library and archives staff were limited in their access to collections-based work and needed valuable and impactful telework. The Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) was founded as a global, dispersed, and virtual library and thus was well-suited to continue to provide service to teleworking researchers as well as telework tasks for staff at BHL's partner institutions. Examples of the telework projects include enhancing BHL metadata, and uploading BHL illustrations to the BHL Flickr collection. BHL makes critical information

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available thanks to all of the partners' efforts to digitize for open access. The natural strengths of the BHL virtual organization include social distancing, virtual collaboration and opening up science; the pandemic world is a natural ecosystem for BHL partners.

Initial analyses of BHL use have shown a significant increase in year-over-year usage of BHL content. The preliminary statistics have shown an approximate 25% increase in usage of the BHL site. BHL has also collected anecdotal evidence in the form of user comments and direct conversations with research staff at BHL partner institutions.

Many national or pan-national organizations and projects were instigated to examine the impact of COVID-19 on library and archives materials. One key project that some BHL partners participated in is Reopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums (REALM) Information Hub: A COVID-19 Research Project. With most BHL partners pausing all digitization around the February-March 2020 time period, outcomes from studies such as REALM will assist partners in understanding when it will be safe for digitization to restart.

This presentation will cover how usage of BHL changed from early 2020 to the present, showing trends and significant impact. The pivot of many BHL partner staff to improve BHL content and metadata for their local users as well as the global biodiversity community will be documented. Also covered will be the enhanced impact of digital libraries, such as BHL, in both the short and long terms along with lessons learned for expanded virtual open access for library collections supporting biodiversity and museum research.

Keywords

digital libraries, digitization, telework, open access, enhanced metadata

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Presented at

TDWG 2020

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